was also pointed out that the terrorist whose release was secured by the hijackers after threatening the lives of the hostages and killing one of them, had made their appearance in Pakistan.

The released terrorists belong to terrorist groups that openly operate from Pakistani territory. The international community has also openly acknowledged the existence of such armed groups involved in terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

Since the military coup, Pakistan has, been enhancing its state sponsorship of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

News Caption "India is Not a Soft State"

3575. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned "India is not a soft state" as reported in the Times of India, on the 24th January, 2000;

(b) if so, whether Government agree with its content;

(c) whether it is a fact that a country like India cannot be kept out of the security Council;

(d) if so, whether the steps taken by Government are gaining ground; and

(e) if so, what extent?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. Government of India is aware of the news item titled 'India is not a soft State' as reported in the Times of India dated 24.1.2000 and agrees with its contents.

(c) to (e) It is generally recognised that by any objective criteria whether of economic vibrancy, political maturity, size of the population or contribution to the activities of the UN relating to maintenance of peace and security, India is a natural and deserving candidate. However, general agreement is yet to be reached in discussions in the UN on expansion and reform of the Security Council.

India's candidature has been endorsed publicly in the UN by. several countries. Statements of support have also been made by many countries during bilateral discussions.